

28 November 2018

Hon Mark Furner MP
Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
PO Box 46
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Minister

Re: Loss of confidence in the operations of Fisheries Queensland and fisheries reform process

On behalf of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA), Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman's Association (GoCCFA) and the Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Association (MBSIA) we seek a review of the operations of Fisheries Queensland (FQ) and the reform process. The Queensland seafood industry have lost faith in the reform process managed by FQ.

The list of grievances industry can produce is significant and many commercial fishing business operators are prepared to testify to poor consultation processes. Far too much influence on the future of the community's access to seafood harvested from the marine resource is being shaped by two groups – some recreational groups and environmental, non-government organisations (eNGOs). These groups pose a threat to the community's supply of locally harvested seafood and the long-term viability of our businesses:

- Recreational fishing groups claim their rights to our marine resources and other than boat registrations pay no licence fees. Commercial fishers pay licence fees to allow them to commercially harvest seafood for our community that cannot or do not want to recreationally fish. There is no faith that recreational fishers will have changes made to bag limits for example.
- eNGOs never fail to have a seat at the fisheries management table yet on multiple occasions QSIA has identified the underlying agenda of green groups¹.

The list of grievances held by the harvest and post-harvest sector is uncomfortably long and includes but is not limited to:

1. Economic and social costs to industry ignored

- The reform process will lead to significant changes in small and large-scale commercial fishing businesses but we are not helping to shape change it is being imposed on us.
- To date, no modelling of any kind has been undertaken to assess the economic and social impacts on industry.

2. Predetermined Fisheries Management Outcomes

- The overwhelming view portrayed by FQ officers is the way forward is the introduction of quota managed fisheries. If the previous management of the Coral Trout and Spanner Crab fisheries is any indication our commercial

¹ <https://qsia.com.au/2018/02/19/queensland-fisheries-reform-process/>

fisheries are in serious trouble if quota is used more broadly as a management tool.

- Despite protests amongst the majority of commercial fishers that this form of management will lead to the decimation of small-scale fishing businesses, an increase in 'quota barons' and the potential distortion of our fisheries markets the reform process continues.
- The purchase of fishing licenses has been achieved using publicly donated money yet the licences remain active suggesting eNGOs wish to enter our markets should they move to quota management arrangements. Why would they want to become commercial fishery investors? The answer is to buy as much quota as possible (potentially withdrawing a percentage of quota available) leading to a restriction in quota available to genuine market participants.

3. VMS

- The industry bodies supporting this letter do not support the introduction of vessel monitoring systems (VMS).
- VMS and its potential economic and social impacts on industry have never been assessed.
- The list of grievances regarding VMS is well known and has been debated amongst industry and in the public arena.
- Industry is aware that VMS trials are ongoing yet the results of those trials may not be made public – in a reform process you would expect this to be the case.

4. Sham Consultation Processes

- The perception amongst industry suggests that the consultation process was established to provide a reference for government to allow them to make the claim that 'we consulted widely' when issues regarding the reform are discussed.
- The process has been so poorly managed government tasked an interstate university to assess how to better engage with commercial fishers.
- Industry was asked to comment on a series of fisheries management papers and a range of views were noted with no overwhelming support for any management option including quota. This has led FQ to argue that quota management is the best way forward since industry has no collective view on the best management arrangements in each fishery.

5. Investment Environment

- It is difficult to identify agriculture sectors with investment warnings that have lasted for over a decade. Why would you invest in your industry under the current investment warnings?

Why is this correspondence so important?

The feeling of mistrust and outright hostility is growing within industry, so what is going on? You also need to appreciate the mental health and stress this reform is having on hundreds of commercial fishing business owners and their families – FQ is dealing with people not numbers. Due to this reform and the introduction of VMS multi-generational fishing families are under considerable personal and economic stress.

Some of these families have all of their savings invested in their businesses while remaining focussed on working to provide seafood to the Queensland and Australian seafood consumer.

The Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027 makes no reference to the overall value of our commercial fisheries. The current gross value of production (GVP) of the Queensland wild harvest fisheries is approximately \$176 million (the beach price or farmgate value). In 2016, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) estimated the economic and social value of NSW fisheries at between \$435-\$500 million based on a GVP of its fisheries of \$82 million. The estimate was in part based on jobs and household income data. Using this study as a reference point our fisheries could have a value somewhere between \$600-\$800 million to the State economy.

It would be great to have an exact figure but there is no desire amongst government to explore an accurate 'economic and social value' because it would undermine the narrative that something is catastrophically wrong that needs to be fixed in this industry. Our economic and social value needs to be explored as this industry has historic links to tourism (domestic and international) and the many essential small regional business operators providing engineering, storage and freight services.

Any further loss of access or increased costs of doing business puts more than just this industry at jeopardy.

We call on you to conduct a full review of FQ and its management of the reform process. If you have any questions regarding this correspondence please contact Eric Perez, QSIA CEO on M: 0417 631 353 or E: eo@qsia.com.au.

